

Message Text

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ORIGIN SS-25

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SUBJECT: BEIRUT FIGHTING: DIALOGUE WITH SYRIANS

REFS: (A) STATE 187079; (B) DAMASCUS 4271; (C) STATE
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1. WE ARE VERY MUCH CONCERNED WITH THE DANGEROUS SITUATION

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CAUSED BY THE FIGHTING IN AND AROUND BEIRUT AND HAVE BEEN
CONSIDERING WHAT STEPS MIGHT BE TAKEN IN ORDER TO PUT
PRESSURE ON THE PARTIES CONCERNED TO DO WHAT THEY CAN TO
CORRECT IT AND TO RESTORE A CEASEFIRE. WE HAVE SOUGHT
TO PERSUADE SYRIA TO FIND POSITIVE STEPS OUT OF THE PRESENT
SITUATION AND TO ASSURE THEM THAT WE WOULD SUPPORT SUCH
EFFORTS. YOU SHOULD THEREFORE MAKE THE FOLLOWING POINTS

TO SYRIAN AMBASSADOR SHOULFI, PLACING THEM WITHIN THE
CONTEXT OF MUTUALLY USEFUL US-SYRIAN DIALOGUE ON MATTERS
LEBANESE STRETCHING BACK TO 1976:

-- NOTE THAT WE HAVE BEEN FULLY AWARE OF THE GREAT
RESTRAINT EXERCISED BY THE SYRIANS SINCE THE JULY 6
CEASEFIRE IN THE FACE OF MANY PROVOCATIONS AND A HIGH
CASUALTY RATE.

-- THE NEW CONFRONTATION IN HADATH, A BEIRUT SUBURB,
WHICH BROKE OUT THIS LAST WEEKEND HAS BECOME SERIOUS.
HEAVY SYRIAN BOMBARDMENTS WERE TAKING PLACE TUESDAY NIGHT,
ALTHOUGH THE SITUATION APPEARS TO BE RELATIVELY QUIET
TODAY. THESE BOMBARDMENTS APPEAR DISPROPORTIONATE AND
CAUSE A HEAVY TOLL IN CIVILIAN CASUALTIES. THEY DO NOT
IN OUR JUDGMENT APPEAR TO BE AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO
DEAL WITH THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE ACTUALLY ATTACKED AND
PROVOKED THE SYRIAN FORCES.

-- FOR HUMANITARIAN REASONS ALONE, WE BELIEVE THE
SYRIANS SHOULD STOP SUCH BOMBARDMENTS AND TRY TO FIND
SOME OTHER WAY TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM. THE EFFECT OF
THESE BOMBARDMENTS IS TO UNITE LEBANESE CITIZENS WHO
OTHERWISE WOULD HAVE NO QUARREL WITH SYRIA'S PEACE-KEEPING
ROLE INTO OPPOSITION TO THE SYRIANS. A CONTINUATION OF
THIS KIND OF CONFRONTATION COULD CAUSE SARKIS TO TRY TO
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RESIGN AGAIN, AND THIS MIGHT MEAN AN END TO LEGITIMATE
GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY IN LEBANON.

-- IN ASKING THE SYRIANS TO EXERCISE RESTRAINT, WE ARE
NOT ACTING IN A ONE-SIDED WAY OR IMPLYING ANY BLAME.
WE HAVE MADE THE STRONGEST POSSIBLE EFFORTS IN URGING
RESTRAINT ON THE MARONITE MILITIA LEADERS. WE HAVE URGED
THE ISRAELIS NOT ONLY TO ACT WITH RESTRAINT BUT TO GET THE
MESSAGE TO THEIR MARONITE CONTACTS IN LEBANON THAT THEY DO
NOT HAVE A BLANK CHECK AND THAT THEY MUST NOT PROVOKE THE
SYRIAN FORCES. WE HAVE BEEN IN REGULAR TOUCH WITH THE
LEBANESE GOVERNMENT LEADERS ALSO, AND WE HAVE TRIED TO
KEEP UP THE DIALOGUE WITH SYRIA, WE HAVE DISCUSSED
WITH THE SYRIANS AND OTHERS VARIOUS PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS
WHICH WOULD REDUCE THE POSSIBILITIES OF FUTURE CONFRON-
TATIONS. WE WOULD GIVE SUPPORT TO ANY DISENGAGEMENT
FORMULA WHICH COULD SEE SECURITY FUNCTIONS IN KEY FLASH-
POINTS TAKEN OVER BY LEBANESE POLICE AND MILITARY UNITS.
SOME STEPS IN THIS DIRECTION HAVE ALREADY BEEN TAKEN, AND
A CEASE-FIRE AND FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS ARE NEEDED TO ALLOW
THE PROCESS TO CONTINUE.

-- WE HOPE THE SYRIANS WILL SUGGEST TO US WAYS IN WHICH
WE MIGHT BE HELPFUL. WE WOULD LIKE TO CONSULT ON WAYS
IN WHICH THE US COULD BE SUPPORTIVE OF NEW ARRANGEMENTS
FOR SECURITY IN THE BEIRUT AREA WHICH SYRIA WOULD CON-
SIDER ACCEPTABLE BUT WOULD ALSO REDUCE THE POSSIBILITY OF
FUTURE TENSIONS AND CONFRONTATIONS. CHRISTOPHER

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